



The Holy See

***GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE DELEGATIONS WHO DONATED THIS YEAR'S
CHRISTMAS TREE AND NATIVITY SCENE IN SAINT PETER'S SQUARE***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 7 December 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for coming! I offer you my welcome and with much appreciation I welcome the gifts you have come to present to me: *the Christmas tree and the Nativity scene*, which have already been arranged in Saint Peter's Square and will be admired by numerous pilgrims coming from every part of the world. I address my warm greeting to each of you, beginning with the Patriarch of Venice and the Bishop of Concordia-Pordenone, whom I thank for their fraternal words. I offer a courteous greeting to the civil authorities, and extend my affectionate thoughts to all the citizens of Jesolo, Pordenone, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, whom you are representing here. I thank those who cooperated in creating these Christmas symbols, in a special way the four sculptors, from different countries, who sculpted the Nativity, and the technicians and staff of the Governorate.

The tree and Nativity scene are two symbols that never cease to fascinate us; they speak to us about Christmas and help us to contemplate the mystery of God who became man to be close to each of us. The Christmas tree with its lights reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world. He is the light of the spirit that drives away the darkness of hostility and makes room for forgiveness. The red spruce that stands in Saint Peter's Square this year, which came from the Forest of Cansiglio, inspires us to further reflection. With its height of over 20 metres, it symbolizes God who, with the Birth of his Son Jesus, lowered himself down to mankind in order to raise humanity up to him and elevate it from the haze of selfishness and sin. The Son of God assumes the human condition in order to draw people to him and make them become participants in his divine and

incorruptible nature.

The Nativity scene, placed in the centre of the Square, was created from Jesolo sand, originating from the Dolomites. The sand, a poor material, recalls the simplicity, the smallness and also the fragility — as the Patriarch said — with which God revealed himself through the Birth of Jesus in the precariousness of Bethlehem.

It might seem to us that this smallness is in contradiction with divinity, such that someone, from the very beginning, has considered it merely an appearance, a facade. But it is not. Because smallness is freedom. One who is small — in the Gospel sense — is not only light, but is also free from any urge to show off, and from any pretense of success; like children who express themselves and move freely. We are all called to be free before God, to have the freedom of a child before his father. The Child Jesus, Son of God and our Saviour, whom we lay down in the Nativity scene, is Holy in poverty, smallness, simplicity, humility.

May the Nativity scene and tree, captivating symbols of Christmas, bring into families and meeting places a reflection of the light and tenderness of God, in order to help everyone to experience the celebration of Jesus' Birth. By contemplating the Child God who emanates light in the humility of the Nativity scene, may we too become witnesses to humility, tenderness and goodness.

Dear friends, I renew my gratitude to all of you and I offer you best wishes for a happy Christmas. A happy and holy Christmas! I ask you to pray for me and I wholeheartedly bless you, your family members and your fellow citizens. Thank you.